



## Feds release new national ed-tech plan

**New standards and assessments that measure key 21st-century skills, and a new vision for teaching and professional development, are among the highlights**

### From staff reports

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Although funding concerns remain, the National Ed-Tech Plan is a promising start, ed-tech advocates say.

The new National Education Technology Plan, released March 5, sets an ambitious agenda for using technology to transform teaching and learning, ed-tech advocates say—and a call to action that is long overdue.

The plan, called “[Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology](#),” calls for engaging and empowering learning experiences for all students; standards and assessments that measure key 21st-century skills and expertise; a shift to a model of “connected teaching,” in which teams of interconnected educators replace solo classroom practitioners; always-on connectivity that is available to students and teachers both inside and outside of school; and a rethinking of basic assumptions, such as seat time, that limit schools’ ability to innovate.

Julie Evans, CEO of the nonprofit organization Project Tomorrow, said the plan provides some “long-overdue recommendations” for how technology can enhance education.

“The plan accurately sums up that hard realization that today’s classroom environment for most students does not mirror the way they are living their lives outside of school or what they need to be prepared for future jobs, and that this disconnect is actually creating a relevancy crisis in American education,” Evans said.

In its [blog](#), the Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA) said the draft plan is very much in line with SIIA's "Vision for K-20" document and noted the plan's emphasis on technology as a tool to create a more productive educational system.

But SIIA said the lack of a dedicated ed-tech funding stream that would result if President Obama's 2011 budget proposal is adopted is still worrisome.

"How credible and viable will the plan and federal leadership be without matching targeted resources?" SIIA says on its blog. "Failing to adequately plan has slowed our nation's progress toward a technology-enabled 21st-century education system, but absent the enabling investments, this important initiative could amount to no more than planning to fail."

The plan is built around five organizing themes: Learning, Assessment, Teaching, Infrastructure, and Productivity. Within each theme, the plan defines key goals and recommendations—and federal Education Department officials are seeking public comments on the plan.

## **Learning**

"The model of 21st-century learning described in this plan calls for engaging and empowering learning experiences for all learners," the plan states. "It brings state-of-the art technology into learning to enable, motivate, and inspire all students—regardless of background, languages, or disabilities—to achieve. It leverages the power of technology to provide personalized learning instead of a one-size-fits-all curriculum, pace of teaching, and instructional practices."

Twenty-first century skills and expertise, "such as critical thinking, complex problem solving, collaboration, and multimedia communication, should be woven into all content areas," the plan says.

Also, students should learn in school using the same technology that professionals in various disciplines use, according to the plan.

"Professionals routinely use the web and tools such as wikis, blogs, and digital content for the research, collaboration, and communication demanded in their jobs," the plan explains. "They gather data and analyze it using inquiry and visualization tools. They use graphical and 3D modeling tools for design. For students, using these real-world tools creates learning opportunities that allow them to grapple with real-world problems—opportunities that prepare them to be more productive members of a globally competitive workforce."

## Assessment

The plan calls for rethinking how states and school systems design and administer assessments, so the tests (1) measure not just content knowledge, but also 21st-century skills and expertise in all subject areas, and (2) provide timely, actionable feedback for educators.

“Technology-based assessments that combine cognitive research and theory about how students think with multimedia, interactivity, and connectivity make it possible to directly assess these types of skills,” the plan states.

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